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ABSTRACT

Through a series of organizational and instructional changes, comprehensive planning aims to make it possible for all children to reach the same high academic standards. Educators and parents of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students, as well as other members of tribal communities, must participate in this planning to ensure that the needs of AI/AN students are considered at the local level. This digest briefly describes key federal legislation and initiatives calling for school reform: Goals 2000, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the renewed Indian Education Act of 1994, and reforms that promote parent involvement and professional development. Each description is followed by several questions that can help AI/AN communities closely examine local school reform plans and decide if these plans are designed to (1) ensure the academic success of AI/AN students and (2) reflect the views of their community. Current school reform emphasizes "locally determined" decision making, so each community will need to tackle the questions posed in this digest in different ways in order to address varying local circumstances and needs. (SV)

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Comprehensive Planning: Guidance for Educators of American Indian and Alaska Native Students

by ORBIS Associates

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Comprehensive Planning: Guidance for Educators of American Indian and Alaska Native Students

by ORBIS Associates

Comprehensive planning for school reform is currently underway at all levels of the educational system, from the training of teachers and administrators, to the organization of schools, to the instructional methods and materials used in classrooms. The purpose of the planning is to help make it possible—through a series of organizational and instructional changes—for *all* children to reach the same high academic standards. Educators and parents of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students, as well as other members of tribal communities, must participate in this planning to ensure that the needs of AI/AN students are carefully considered at the *local level*.

This Digest provides brief descriptions of key federal legislation and initiatives calling for school reform. Each description is followed by a series of questions that can help American Indian and Alaska Native communities closely examine local school reform plans and decide if those plans are designed to (1) ensure the academic success of AI/AN students and (2) reflect the views of their community. Current school reform emphasizes "locally determined" decision making, so each community will need to tackle the questions posed in this Digest in different ways. There is no "one best way" to address AI/AN student needs since local circumstances and needs vary from one community to the next.

Goals 2000

When the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was passed in 1994, it set the year 2000 as a target date for reaching the National Education Goals of 1990. Under this law, states and school districts are encouraged to use their federal monies in combination with other state and local resources for projects to improve both teaching and learning. The Act also encourages schools to form partnerships with parents, tribes, and businesses, and requires a *school improvement plan* to "reflect the student body representation" (Licitra & Miller, 1994, p. 6). The National Education Goals and the beliefs reflected in the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* have helped shape much of the school reform effort that has followed.

> *How many schools with Indian students in your district have Goals 2000 projects? Do those projects reflect Indian community views on schooling? How have parents of AI/AN students helped to develop the School Improvement Plan?*

Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*

In 1994, Congress passed the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) as part of the *Improving America's Schools Act* (IASA). The new ESEA is based on the belief that all students can learn and are, therefore, entitled to schooling that helps them strive for and meet high academic standards. To meet this challenge, ESEA (especially Title I, the section of the Act that focuses on serving under-achieving children from low-income families) encourages schools to rethink how all of their local, state, and federal money could better help all students learn at higher levels.

This new legislation reflects a major change in thinking. Now, if all students are not reaching high academic standards, the fault will be seen as resting with the schools, not with the children. The new Act urges schools to consider making several specific types of changes: (1) to give students who need it extra help right in their classrooms instead of pulling them out to work with them separately, (2) to make the school day and/or year longer, and (3) to make sure that the services that children and their families need are better coordinated between schools and community agencies.

The new Title I stresses setting up *schoolwide* programs in schools with 50 percent or more children from low-income families. While some Title I programs will still be *targeted assistance* programs (that is, the old system that singles out certain students for special help), schoolwide programs are encouraged whenever possible (*Federal Register*, 1995). In schoolwide programs, schools are supposed to use Title I money to improve teaching and learning in the entire school. They may also combine most of their federal education monies with other state and local resources to support their comprehensive school reform efforts. In other words, *all* students—not just Title I students—then benefit from Title I money (Pechman & Fiester, 1994, pp. 1-2). *Consolidation of efforts* is to be the game plan. It should be noted, however, that to support strong Indian community control, *Indian Education Act* (IEA, described next) funds *cannot* be put into the schoolwide pot of money without IEA Parent Committee approval.

> *How many Title I schools in your district have schoolwide programs? How many have targeted assistance programs? How many AI/AN students are in these schools and how are their specific needs served by these programs? Is the Indian community well represented on Title I planning committees, schoolwide committees, parent advisory committees, or other planning efforts?*

Indian Education Act

The renewed *Indian Education Act* (IEA), passed in 1994, included many important changes. Unfortunately, these changes are not well known in Indian country. Therefore, they have not yet widely affected the rethinking of education services to AI/AN students *or* the IEA projects. Several new items in IEA deserve special attention.

The number one purpose of IEA is, as always, to meet the "special educational and culturally related academic needs" of AI/AN students (*Congressional Record*, 1994, sec. 9101[1][c]). Yet—just like Title I described above—the 1994 Act requires that IEA grant money be used to

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support school districts in their reform efforts. IEA projects must directly promote the goals of state and local improvement plans. Equally as important, every IEA application for grant money must include a *comprehensive plan* that explains how other federal, state, and local programs, *especially under Title I*, will meet the needs of *all* AI/AN students in the school district. The plan should describe how all school resources will be used to help improve AI/AN student performance *and* how the IEA monies will *add to* (not take the place of) this effort. Notably, the Act also *requires* school districts receiving IEA funds to regularly check the progress of *all* AI/AN students (not just the AI/AN students who receive IEA services) in meeting the goals of the state and local improvement plans (*Congressional Record*, 1994, sec. 9114[b][6][A]). In other words, school districts must show that their efforts for improvement are actually helping AI/AN students achieve high academic performance. *And*, school districts must report on their progress to the community. From now on, Indian communities should be informed exactly how their children are doing in the school system. This information will help communities work closely with schools, on an ongoing basis, to continue improving Indian student performance.

For local Indian Education Act projects, this means all plans now must reflect the same high academic goals adopted under Title I for all other students. For some IEA projects this will require a major change: Projects that are not directly tied to one or more school improvement goal(s)—either academic or behavioral—no longer meet the legislative requirements.

IEA funding is only one program that, when combined with other larger programs, makes up a total school package for meeting AI/AN students' needs. *All* district programs (including IEA) must work together in a unified effort to meet those needs.

Does your IEA project plan support your local or state school reform efforts? Is the IEA project directly tied to specific school improvement goal(s) and does it add to—but not replace—school district responsibilities for educating all its students?

Parent Involvement and Professional Development

Two important focuses of school reform—increased *parent involvement* and *professional development* opportunities—deserve special attention from Indian people. Increased parent involvement is a key feature of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Districts are urged to set aside money for helping parents learn skills and for family literacy (*Congressional Record*, 1994, sec. 1118[a][3][A]). Also, each school must now write a *Parent Involvement Policy* that describes ways the school will work to increase the role played by parents in all aspects of their children's education. This policy *must* be written with the help of parents and its success must be judged annually. If the plan is found to be ineffective, the school district is responsible for figuring out why and for making needed changes. These new requirements should be a big help to Indian communities for identifying and eliminating barriers that prevent meaningful parent involvement.

Does your district have a written "Parent Involvement Policy"? Has the Indian community helped design and write it? Does the policy spell out ways to break down barriers that keep Indian parents from being involved in ways that really matter?

Quality professional development opportunities are a must for school reform (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996). So, school districts are rethinking their plans for such training, especially as to who should receive it and what the content should be. IEA also requires applicants to describe the training opportunities the school district will provide to make sure that "teachers and other school professionals who are new to the Indian community are prepared to work with AI/AN children" (*Congressional Record*, 1994, sec. 9114[b][1][B]). That IEA requirement, however, is *not* stating that IEA's limited monies should be used for this purpose. There are many much larger pots of money to do this; for example, federal money under Titles I and II of ESEA and Title III of Goals 2000, plus state and local sources. IEA funds are better used for direct services to AI/AN students.

As a result of school reform, many teachers and school administrators are facing basic changes in how they do their jobs. Consequently, at this time most professional development training monies are being used to help them during the transition period. But, parents and community members are *also* entitled to be part of school training programs. So parents and Indian community members need to be assertive about their inclusion in school professional development initiatives. (*Congressional Record*, 1994, sec. 1112[b][1][C][A][3], 1114[b][1][D], 1119[d]; U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p. ii).

Is there a professional development plan for your school and did Indian parents or community members help write it? Does the professional development plan include training for teachers and school staff on how to make schools more supportive places for AI/AN student success in meeting high academic standards? Will training opportunities be offered to parents and community members?

Conclusion

Our nation's schools are undertaking school reform so that *all* children can reach high academic standards. This, then, is the challenge: To use this national educational reform movement to dramatically improve AI/AN student performance. To meet this challenge, everyone with a stake in Indian education must actively participate in *all* comprehensive planning efforts. They must ask themselves how they can use this window of opportunity to help more of their students become academic leaders, Merit Scholars, and role models for all other students to follow.

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ORBIS Associates, a nationally recognized Indian-controlled education firm located in Washington, DC, is continuing its 15-year history of developing culture-based academic curriculum, training educators and parents of AI/AN students and their peers, and analyzing school reform policies and practices for effective use with AI/AN students.

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